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English instructors' professional development need areas and predictors of professional development needs

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify English instructors' professional development needs and to examine the role of years of teaching experience, workload, department of graduation, and instructors' perceptions of professional development programs in predicting professional development needs. The instructors were asked to indicate their degree of need in various areas of professional development via a questionnaire. The total scores for each area were calculated to identify the areas in which the degree of need was the highest and lowest. The results showed that the highest degree of need was "New theories and practices of ELT," followed by "Use of technology in ELT." Teachers' degree of need was lowest in "Lesson planning" and "Classroom management." The results indicated that only length of teaching experience was significant in predicting professional development needs.

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1. Introduction

Rapid changes in educational activities all around the world have brought new requirements into classroom instructions. Teachers must be aware of these changes overtime and they have to keep up with them. This is important in order to be able to deal with the challenges the teachers face in classrooms. In addition, the university education at teaching departments may not meet the rising expectations.

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Therefore, teachers should continue their learning while they are working. They should follow new innovations, share ideas and experiences with their colleagues, and reflect on their performance.

The most rapid change in language teaching happened after the introduction of computers into language classrooms. The recent developments in computer and communication technologies and cost reduction in obtaining technological tools accelerated the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the language classroom. More and more computers with Internet connection have begun to appear in educational institutions. This integration of technology has influenced different aspects such as the educational setting, places where and how learning come about, and the roles and responsibilities of students and teachers in the classroom (Janssens-Bevernage, Cornille&Mwaniki, 2005).

For the most effective integration of ICT and the improvement of teacher competencies, professional development programs are very crucial. Guskey (2002) stated that high-quality in professional development programs is a fundamental element for better education. He added that the content of the professional development programs can vary widely, but their share a purpose which is improving the classroom performance of teachers, and changing their attitudes and beliefs to provide their students with better education.

Experts are searching for strategies to develop more effective professional development programs. Effective programs can be achieved as long as the programs are based on teachers' needs. Lee (2005) stated that in professional development programs "administrators put a lot of emphases on the latest hot topics, rather than attempting to individualize, and personalize professional growth plans" (p.39). Institutions must recognize the needs of teachers to make them more dynamic, to change their personal approach, and stimulate them to develop. In other words, an effective professional development is possible when it responds to teachers' personal needs. Therefore, before planning a professional development program, it is necessary to collect information about teachers' needs.

The topics that the professional development programs focus on are usually determined not by the teachers but by the administration in an institution or by the trainers. The content is usually a reflection of trainers' own interest or chosen among trendy issues in the profession. However, in order to be able to develop effective professional development programs, teachers' perceptions, expectations, and needs have to be identified and the programs must be developed accordingly.

When professional development activities are based on teachers' needs decisions how to place teachers in different activities will be more appropriate. Koç (1992) suggests that organizers should first determine the needs of the teachers and then select the teachers to participate in in-service training. Similarly, Evans (1998) points out that in planning a teacher training program, the needs of the trainees should be analyzed as the initial step. Once the needs are determined, they should be categorized in terms of skills, knowledge and attitude. Aims should be set, bearing in mind the participants' knowledge, experience, previous training, the workload, practical and financial constraints. Trainers are selected and decisions about the course content are made.

Considering all these factors, teachers should be asked about their needs by means of surveys and other assessment instruments, and professional development programs must be designed considering the needs of the teachers. There are a significant number of previous studies aimed to determine the perceptions of the teachers about professional development or in-service training programs and determining the areas on which a training is needed. Karaaslan (2003), for example, in her case study, examined teachers' perceptions of self-initiated professional development at Baskent University. Alan

(2003) also studied the perceptions of novice teacher on in-service training programs at Anadolu University. He determined the areas where teachers needed professional development. Ozen (1997) investigated the perceived needs and expectations of the staff in Freshman Unit at Bilkent University. She also identified some need areas as well.

What differentiates this study from the previous ones is that it doesn't only aim to identify the perceptions of instructors on professional development and the areas where they need professional development. In this study factors including perceptions of professional development programs, years of experience, departments teachers graduated, and workload were also examined to predict professional development needs. In the previous studies (Sentuna, 2002; Duzan, 2006) teachers were divided into two groups as novice teachers and experienced teachers, and their needs were compared to see if there was a difference between them. In this study teaching experience was considered as a continuous variable, and its role together with the perceptions of the instructors on professional development, department the instructors graduated and their workload in predicting the professional development need was examined.

2. Purpose

The main purpose of this was to identify instructors' perceptions of professional development and the degree of need in each area. This study also examined the role of the perceptions of the instructors about professional development programs, years of teaching experience, department the instructors graduated, and the instructors' workload on predicting the degree of professional development needs of the instructors.

2.1. Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What are instructors' perceptions of professional development programs?
2. In what areas of teaching English do instructors need a professional development program?
3. How well do perception of professional development programs, department they graduated, years of teaching experience, and workload predict the degree of need?

3. Participants

Ninety-two English language instructors working in a state university in Istanbul participated in the study. Of these instructors, 79 were full-time instructors, while the remaining 13 were part-time instructors. Table 1 summarizes the demographic information about the participants. The majority of the instructors were women (88%). Graduates of the teaching department had the highest percentage (48%), and followed by the graduates of the literature department (34%). Linguistics graduates constituted 3% of the population. The least participation was from the translation department with only 2%. Of all the participants only 9% did not hold a teaching certificate. The mean of the participants' ages was 38, and the age range was from 22 to 63. Years of teaching experience yielded a mean of 13 and was ranging from 1 to 38. Generally, most full-time teachers have only one class and teach this class for approximately 15 hours a week. However, part-time instructors have at least 2 or 3 different groups and teach approximately 22 hours. The range of teaching hours was from 12 to 31. The mean of teaching hours was 16. Just 4% of the total population was teaching more than 25 hours a week. The number of groups taught differed from 1 to 5. The mean score for the number of groups taught was calculated as 1.7.

Table 1
Demographic Information of the Participants

<i>Variables</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender		
Female	81	88.0
Male	11	12.0
Department		
Teaching	48	52.2
Literature	34	37.0
Linguistics	3	3.3
Translation	2	2.2
Other	5	5.4
Teaching Certificate		
Yes	84	91.3
No	8	8.7
Form of Employment		
Full-time	79	85.9
Part-time	13	14.1

4. Data Collection

Data were collected through a questionnaire prepared by the researchers. Items were developed through review of related literature and examining existing questionnaires (Arikan, 2002; Karaarslan, 2003; Gultekin, 2007) related to professional development. To provide evidence for content validity, four experts (in the fields of needs assessment, measurement and evaluation, program development, and professional development for language teachers) reviewed the questionnaire. Necessary changes were made based on the suggestions, and it was piloted with eight teachers. The final version of the questionnaire had three parts.

In the first part, the participants were given six statements about their perceptions of professional development programs. They were asked to indicate how much they agree with each statement on a five-point scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Sample items read included “Attending professional development programs makes me feel more confident while teaching” and “Professional development programs improve teaching competence.” The reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .90.

In the second part of the questionnaire, the participants were given 21 different areas for professional development, and they were asked to indicate their degree of need for each area on a five-point scale where 1 indicated “no need” and 5 indicated “very high need.” Exploratory factor analysis yielded 3-

factor solution as the most interpretable one. Factor 1 refers to professional development areas which are common to all subject areas. In other words, these areas are related to not only teaching English, but teaching of all other subject areas such as science or geography. These areas included “Lesson planning,” “Classroom management,” “Syllabus design,” “Assessment,” “Preparing supplementary materials,” “Time management,” “Test development,” “Classroom research,” “Increasing motivation,” and “Learner characteristics.” Therefore, the first factor was named as “common need areas.” In factor 2, methods which are started to be used more recently in teaching of English come together. These items in factor 2 were “Using games,” “Using technology,” “Giving constructive feedback,” “Drama,” “Storytelling,” and “Integrated skills.” Factor 2 was named as “contemporary need areas.” In the last factor, areas which can be considered as special interests were gathered. These were not needed to teach an ordinary class, but teacher who are specifically interested in these areas would need them. These items included “Preparing students for specific exams such as TOEFL or KPDS (National Language Exam),” “Common European Framework of References for Languages,” “English for specific purposes,” and “Training other teachers.” For that reason, this factor was called as “special interest need areas.” In addition, reliabilities of the subscales were estimated through Cronbach alpha coefficients. The alpha values were found to be .88 for common need areas, .86 for contemporary need areas, and .71 for special interest need areas, indicating high internal consistency.

In the last part of the questionnaire, demographic information about the instructors such as gender, age, years of teaching experience, department graduated, holding a teaching certificate or not, form of employment, instructors’ workload, and the number of groups taught were gathered.

5. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis were used to analyze the data. After data were collected, all the responses were entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). More specifically, to analyze the data to answer first and second research questions, descriptive statistics were generated. In order to analyze the data related to the last research question, three separate simultaneous regression analyses were performed. In the regression analysis, the three factors appeared in the factor analysis were used as the outcome variables. These variables were common need areas, contemporary need areas, and special interest need areas. The predictor variables were perception of professional development programs, department they graduated, years of teaching experience, and workload. Weekly teaching hours was considered as the workload of the instructors. The department variable was coded into two levels: teaching department graduates (1) and graduates of other departments (2). All the necessary assumptions for regression analysis were checked. For normality of residuals, histogram and normal P-P plot of residuals were examined. In addition, univariate normality was checked. For homoscedasticity, scatter plot was examined. In order to check for multicollinearity, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values were examined.

6. Limitations

The approach used in the study focused on identifying self-perceived professional development needs of the instructors. The study examined the self-reported needs. In other words, the teachers reported the areas in which they themselves think they need development. It is assumed that the teachers were sincere and truthful in their statements and in their self-evaluation. Moreover, this study was carried out in one specific institution. Therefore, the result of this study provided information about that institution and identified the situation there, so the results cannot be generalized to other contexts.

7. Results

The first research question (“What are instructors’ perceptions of professional development programs?”) sought to determine the perceptions of the instructors about professional development programs. Items in the first part of the questionnaire were used to answer this research question. As shown in Table 2, the mean scores for each statement varied between 3.50 and 4.12. Item 4 (“Professional development programs make me reconsider my teaching methods”) received the highest mean score ($M = 4.12$), whereas item 5 (“Professional development programs are relevant to my needs and interests”) received the lowest mean score ($M = 3.50$).

Table 2
Perceptions of Professional Development Programs

<i>Items</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Professional development programs make me reconsider my teaching methods	4.12	0.71
2. Professional development programs improve teaching competence	4.07	0.69
3. Attending professional development programs make me feel more confident while teaching	3.99	0.81
4. Professional development programs help me improve my teaching skills	3.98	0.69
5. Professional development programs give me practical information that I can use in my classroom	3.80	0.83
6. Professional development programs are relevant to my needs and interests	3.50	0.78

The second research question was “In what areas of teaching English do instructors need a professional development program?” Table 3 displays the degree of professional development needs in descending order. Findings indicated that the area where the degree of need is the highest was “New theories and practices of ELT” ($M = 3.32$) which is followed by “Use of technology in ELT” ($M = 3.25$). On the other hand, it was found out that the teachers’ degree of need is the lowest in the “Lesson planning” and “Classroom management” with the same mean value ($M = 1.87$).

Table 3
Professional Development Need Areas

<i>Areas</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. New theories and practices of ELT	3.32	1.12

2. Use of technology in ELT	3.25	1.23
3. English for Specific Purposes (ESP)	3.10	1.37
4. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)	3.07	1.32
5. Using games in ELT	3.05	1.21
6. Using drama in ELT	3.03	1.26
7. Teaching integrated skills	3.00	1.19
8. Preparing students for exams (e.g. KPDS, UDS, TOFEL, IELTS etc.)	2.96	1.33
9. Assessment and evaluation	2.91	1.06
10. Increasing student motivation	2.90	1.35
11. Test development	2.86	1.14
12. Conducting classroom research	2.85	1.16
13. Preparing supplementary materials	2.76	1.33
14. Story telling	2.70	1.15
15. Training other teachers	2.64	1.31
16. Giving constructive feedback	2.58	1.10
17. Identifying learner characteristics	2.35	1.03
18. Syllabus design	2.30	1.12
19. Time management in classroom	2.04	1.10
20. Classroom management	1.87	.97
21. Lesson planning	1.87	.93

To answer the last research question, three separate simultaneous regression analyses were conducted to evaluate how well teachers' perception of professional development, department they graduated, their years of teaching experience, and workload predicted their professional development needs. Findings are summarized in Table 4. Prior to running the first regression analysis, all the necessary assumptions were checked and a significance level of .05 was established.

Table 4
Summary of Regression Analyses for Common Need Areas, Contemporary Need Areas, and Special Interest Areas

Predictors	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>
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<i>Outcome variable: Common Need Areas</i>				
Perception of professional development	-.02	.15	-.01	-.12
Department graduated	-.02	.17	-.01	-.10
Years of teaching experience	-.03	.01	-.37	-2.91*
Workload	-.01	.02	-.05	-.42
<i>Outcome variable: Contemporary Need Areas</i>				
Perception of professional development	-.08	.17	-.06	-.48
Department graduated	.03	.20	.02	.17
Years of teaching experience	-.03	.01	-.31	-2.38*
Workload	-.03	.02	-.16	-1.34
<i>Outcome variable: Special Interest Need Areas</i>				
Perception of professional development	.15	.18	.09	.82
Department graduated	.16	.21	.08	.79
Years of teaching experience	-.04	.01	-.30	-2.45*
Workload	.01	.02	.03	.26

For common need areas, contemporary need areas, and special interest need areas, only years of teaching experience was found to be significant among predictors. It was negatively related with professional development need variables. In other words, as the years of teaching experience goes up, the need for professional development in common areas, contemporary areas, and special interest areas decreases. Overall explained variance was 12% for common need areas, 7% for contemporary need areas, and 16% for special interest need areas.,

8. Discussions

One of the main purposes of this study was to identify the perceptions of the instructors about professional development. The results showed that instructors' perceptions of the professional development programs were generally positive. Mean values of the statements about perceptions of professional development ranged between 3.50 and 4.12, indicating that they were mostly positive towards the professional development programs. This result is consistent with the previous studies (Gultekin, 2007; Karaaslan, 2003).

In the present study, the professional development need areas were also investigated. A list of professional development areas was provided and participants were asked to indicate their degree of need for each area. The results showed that the participants needed professional development in "New theories and practices of ELT". This result indicates that instructors are aware of the changes going on in their profession. They do not ignore the innovations. In contrast, they think it is necessary to update themselves about new trends such as critical thinking, multiple intelligence and application of Neuro Linguistic Programming in English language teaching. They are not resistant to learning new things. "Use of technology" was found out to be the area with the highest degree of need after "New theories and practices of ELT". Instructors felt that they were not competent enough to use technology in the classroom.

The last research question aimed to determine how well teachers' perception of professional development, departments they graduated, years of teaching experience, and workload predicted their professional development needs. Findings of three simultaneous regression analyses showed that among all four predictors only years of teaching experience was a significant predictor of professional development needs. It appeared that years of teaching experience was negatively correlated with perceived professional development needs, indicating as the years of teaching experience increased, the

need for professional development in the three factors decreased. Similar results were obtained in other studies, as well. In the study by Sentuna (2002), the years of teachers' experience were categorized into two groups as "novice" and experienced teachers, and in Karaaslan's study (2003), into three groups as "teachers with less than 6 years' experience", "teachers with experience between 6-10 years" and "teachers with more than 10 years' experience". Mean scores of teachers in these categories were compared by using t-test and one way Anova. Sentuna (2002) found out that the novice teachers were more interested than the experienced teachers in most of the topic areas related to INSET content. Karaaslan (2003), on the other hand, found out that teachers who had less than 10 years of experience were more open to new challenges in teaching than more experienced teachers.

The average for the years of teaching experience of the participants in this study was quite high, which was around 13. This shows it is quite an experienced group. As Karaaslan (2003) states as teachers get older or more experienced in their jobs, they may not be in search of innovations, get into monotony, and be willing to stick to their old ways. They feel secure with their own practice. Day (1999) also states that for teachers who are older or who have more than 10 years of experience, it is possible to go through a monotony and disenchantment in their profession. On the other hand, young teachers are more enthusiastic about freedom to test new ideas or new techniques. They are more courageous to try out new things when compared to relatively older teachers.

"Lesson planning" and "Classroom management" were determined as the areas where professional development was needed the least. This finding can also be a result of working with a group of highly experienced teachers. They may be relying on the classroom management and lesson planning skills that they have developed in time, so they do not feel that they need improvement in these areas. The previous studies to determine the professional development needs of teachers with different years of experience revealed contradictory results. Although "Lesson planning" and "Classroom management" were two of the areas where the degree of need was the least in this study, they were identified as the most important areas. Ozen (1997) and Alan (2003) in their studies indicated that "Classroom management" was one of the areas where teachers wanted to improve themselves most. On the other hand, Gultekin (2007) found the experienced instructors seemed to have fewer classroom management problems than the novice instructors, and novice instructors were more interested than experienced instructors in "Lesson planning."

9. Recommendations for Future Research

In this study, the data were collected through a questionnaire developed by the researcher. It was the only data gathering source used in the study. In a further study, other methods of data gathering can be used such as focus group interview or observation to have a more in-depth understanding of the situation. The responses given in the questionnaire were instructors' self-assessment. It is difficult to evaluate if the responses given reflect the real situation. Therefore, observations by the trainers during the class hours are recommended for further research to identify teachers' needs more effectively.

In this study, the data which were based on the instructors' responses were studied to determine the needs of the instructors. Another study can be carried out to include the institution in the process as well so that the needs of the institution can be determined as well. It is also important to identify what administrators or institutions think their teachers need for their professional development. Including institutions in such a study is also important to identify how institutions can help their instructors to develop in their professions.

This study was carried out in the English department of the institution. However, in the same school, there are also German and French departments. The same study can be carried out in German and French departments as well to identify at what points the results overlap or differ.

This study can also be carried out in other institutions to compare the results obtained from this study with those from different institutions to see whether contextual differences influence the instructors' perception of professional development and their needs.

In order to determine the areas where instructors needed professional development the most, they are given a wide range of areas and asked to indicate their degree of need for each area. A further research can be carried out to get more specific information about the areas where the degree of need is higher than the others.

10. Conclusion

Professional development is necessary for teachers to expand their knowledge and understanding of teaching and to develop their teaching skills. Opportunities to help teachers to improve themselves in their profession must be provided. Professional development activities where teachers explore their teaching and share experiences with other colleagues on different topics must be offered to the teachers. However, before the type of the activity and content are decided, it is necessary to determine their needs.

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